

## Log 2: The Children of Surelis

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Summary: Finally, a lead to the whereabouts of Lt. Tom Paris. Vega Surelis, a mysterious region of the Myti

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NOTE: Here's the revised version of Log 2. There's not much change except for changes in the grammar and spelling (!). I've added a few new parts and corrected some continuity errors. Hope you enjoy it! Do give me a few comments on it and email it to [liztai@hotmail.com](mailto:liztai@hotmail.com)

LOG 2: THE CHILDREN OF SURELIS By Lanna ([liztai@hotmail.com](mailto:liztai@hotmail.com))

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### Chapter 1...The Sentinel

Awareness came quite slowly for the Captain. As she opened her eyes, she noticed her crewmen - most of them on the floor - getting up; groaning as they tried. Biting her lip from what she supposed was a dislocated shoulder; Janeway finally focused her eyes - On a pair of boots. They weren't Federation boots. Adrenaline surged through her body and Janeway reached for her phaser- "Peace. I do not mean you harm," a voice said. She supposed it was the owner of the boots who spoke. Janeway looked up as quickly as her aching head allowed her. The humanoid was thankfully not Mylkrie. As far as she could see, it was humanoid. Now, it was just a silhouette against the brightness of the alien ship on the screen. All Janeway could see of the alien was the glint of its long slanted eyes on its mask-like face. In his hand was a staff, tipped with a black edged blade - a weapon? She tensed. "Who are you?" Janeway managed to croak. "I'm the Sentinel of my people, the Binoms." A pause. "Do you require assistance?" The creature's mouth did not move. It had to be a mask. Still, there was

something vaguely familiar about it - though Janeway didn't know how it should be so. "How did you get here?" she persisted, still wary. From the corner of her eye, she saw Chakotay get up, and start- a quick look from her made him draw his hand away from a phaser lying nearby. "Your shields were down." It stated flatly. "Captain!" Tuvok's voice came from a corner, as startled as a Vulcan could get. "It's alright Tuvok." , Janeway thought, swallowing. "Thank you for your offer, but-" "Your attempt to decline my offer is not wise, Captain," replied the Binom before she could even finish. Telepathic? Janeway wondered. "This sector is isolated. There are no ports to service your ship for another 10 light years. Your ship has suffered severe hull breach and your warp engines are in danger of being vented." The Binom studied them for a moment, then as an after thought, it offered its staff to Janeway. Janeway got to her feet unsteadily, taking it reluctantly, wondering what the gesture meant. "I have offered my staff to you as a gesture of my sincerity. I mean you no harm. I would have destroyed you easily with the Mylkrie ship. If you check your sensors, the Mylkrie vessels have been utterly destroyed. You are safe." "He's right!" Harry Kim replied. Shaken, but suffering only minor cuts and bruises, he looked startled- "I detect space debris...very fine space debris," he emphasized, looking at the Binom in half wonderment, half fear. "It looks as if they were incinerated." Looking down at the staff, Janeway hoped she was making the right choice. The staff was cold and surprisingly light in her hands. They have too little options left, and if there's a lesson she learnt well from Delta Quadrant, it is this: Never refuse help. "I thank you for your offer...sentinel. We will accept it."

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B'Elanna watched, amazed, as the Binom ship - still sparkling and absolutely beautiful, led Voyager into the area of space called Vega Surelis. She was on the bridge, overseeing repairs from the engineering console. As Voyager approached the desolate three-planet system, they realized what they saw was not what it seemed. The image of the three planets rippled and dissolved- Into a system so rich with planets that some appeared as bright stars. "Unbelievable." Harry Kim stated. "A holoprojector that big?" "Right," Chakotay answered. "But for what purpose?" Harry shot a look at the Captain, but her gaze was on the view screen, her lips a thin and grim line. They were being towed into Vega Surelis by the ship, and frankly, Chakotay didn't like the feeling of being led by the hand blind. But he knew they were literally a sitting duck. They needed all the help they could get - even from hostile strangers. B'Elanna however, could only think of the Binoms as a blessing in disguise - and a vital clue to where Tom could be. For all she knew, he was with them, chatting happily, mingling with the native females... That thought brought a smile when it would have made her snarl a few months ago. Anything, anything to see him alive again! They approached a planet - it was M-Class, Harry reported. Heavy Nitrogen base with sufficient oxygen to support them without environmental suits needed. Just perfect.

Janeway thought as Voyager shook. She turned away to monitor the readings from the science station. M Class planet, perhaps the size of Earth. Five main continents, with a large concentration on the north. Voyager shook as it entered the planet's atmosphere. "Captain!" Chakotay exclaimed. Janeway turned around, wondering what Chakotay was surprised at - The planet began disappearing before her. "Another illusion?" B'Elanna remarked, voicing their thoughts. The Chief Engineer's eyes had darkened, and a scowl began to form - she was growing suspicious, and Janeway couldn't help but wonder. "Keep

on your toes, everyone," she warned, as she returned to her seat. The planet had dissolved into the largest space array she'd ever seen. It stood ominously in the darkness of space, surrounded by fertile planets. It was as large as a Dyson Sphere, and it spun gracefully on an invisible axis, throwing sparkles of light like a beacon. "Scan the array, Ensign Kim," she ordered. "Nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere. That's all I could get, Captain - the sensors have been scrambled. Janeway frowned. It was then that Sentinel spoke over the comm channels. "Captain, welcome to Surelis."

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The away team consisted of B'Elanna, Chakotay, Tuvok and Janeway herself. After docking in a port of some sort inside Surelis, Janeway had received a message - audio only - from the Sentinel, who had helpfully introduced himself as Bahne. Bahne was a quiet sort of fellow. Dignified in his manner, he spoke little and explained even less. Despite it, Janeway found it easy to trust him, but was it a ruse? Or merely the truth? They transported off Voyager and rematerialised two hundred feet below the docking clamps. B'Elanna looked up at Voyager, and saw that it was surrounded by other Binoms. They appeared remarkably similar, uniform even - same masks, same clothes. "Are you ready?" The voice made B'Elanna jump. Chakotay threw her a reassuring smile. She returned the gesture with a smile of her own. She was half afraid that the Captain would refuse her request to accompany them - she had been so jittery arriving at Surelis. Bahne had appeared before them from nowhere, regal and calm. "Yes we are." Janeway replied. She proceeded to introduce the away team, while B'Elanna wondered why she found Bahne oddly unsettling. she thought. Bahne acknowledged them with a slow nod and proceeded to lead them silently through the corridors - some of them 20 feet high. As they passed through the corridors, they saw some Binoms at work; some merely standing still (guarding perhaps? They don't seem to be guarding anything), some walking with drone-like purpose to unknown destinations, never sparing the away team a curious glance. "Where are we going?" "We are to see the Mylar." He said, as cool as a Vulcan. "The Mylar?" she heard Janeway say. "Our...leader." he hesitated, as if the word was foreign to him. He continued to ignore them for the rest of the journey. "Amazing isn't it?" Chakotay whispered to her as they walked through the labyrinth that was Surelis. "What is?" B'Elanna tore her eyes from a Binom to look at Chakotay. "How this whole place had the resemblance...of a hive." Echoing her thoughts. He was right, B'Elanna thought, looking up. Chakotay had a right to be uncomfortable. B'Elanna remembered their claustrophobic days in Borg space. The days where they spent 24 hour shifts looking for signs of Borg ships, nursing the painful fear that they would be boarded and assimilated any time soon with Seven as a loud, ringing beacon on their ship. It wouldn't do to be trapped in another situation like that again. The walls around them were alive with activity. The corridors were mainly a cut through what was ten or twenty...or even hundreds of floors. Each floor was awash with activity. Binoms moving about in calculated processions...Yes, it reminded her of the- She shivered. The Borg. She was getting a bad feeling from all of this.

The reached a twenty foot tall doorway that slid noiselessly open for them. It dominated the end of the corridor, ancient runes covering most of its surface. A few Binoms guarded the entrance. Most bowed respectfully to Bahne when he approached them. "We are here," the Sentinel announced, sparing them a glance as he walked through the

doorway. Chakotay frowned. He had straightened his back unconsciously - B'Elanna knew that he was nervous and suspicious, and as she looked at the Captain, she saw her lips thin with doubt. The room they entered was extraordinarily bright. A great number of Binoms flanked it left and right - there appeared to be hundreds of them. However, the Binoms in this room bore a marked difference to the others they saw outside. They wore different attires, some white some black.

B'Elanna thought wryly. The masks were still evident, but some allowed white, flowing hair to appear behind them. Janeway wondered at that moment, frowning. She'd been to many worlds, seen many cultures - she could even number a former-Borg colony as one of her many acquaintances, but the Bonims unsettled her for reasons she did not know. They appeared vaguely ...repressed. As if they hid a secret too big to share. Forcing her primal fears aside, she let her Starfleet training take over. "My Sentinel." A voice boomed. The voice bore a remarkable resemblance to Bahne's. Bahne moved away from them to approach a throne. There, sat what she supposed was the Mylar, leader of the Binoms. The Binom stood up as Bahne approached, but it cast its eyes on them. The Mylar wore a white and silver robe decorated with black runes. The Mylar regarded them impassively behind his ebony mask. Bahne had moved to the left of the Mylar. From the right, another Binom dressed in white, joined him. "I deem that your journey was well?" the Mylar questioned. "Yes, it was." Janeway replied, smiling. But B'Elanna saw the guarded gleam in her captain's eyes. "We thank you for your help," she added. "Yes, my eldest has always been the kind one." The Mylar remarked, his tone odd. "Your eldest?" Chakotay piqued. "He is your son?" Bahne looked at the away team. "They all are." The Mylar replied, the yellow eyes of his mask seem to glint. He studied their puzzled faces for a long while before he was interrupted. "I believe the humans have only a few children in their lifetime...Mylar." said the Bonim in white. "Is that right, Iolo?" A pause. After a moment, the Mylar rose. "Captain Janeway, these are all my children-" he gestured grandly at the assembly. "-all 2,253 of them." B'Elanna took that in, swallowing. "I am glad your ship survived the Mylkrie," the Mylar continued, walking towards them. "We consider them pests." The Mylar continued. "Yes, very persistent pests. I am glad for your assistance, Mylar. Thank you for availing your port to us." "We consider it an honour. Perhaps you would seek for supplies and food?" "We'll be glad." Chakotay smiled. "Bahne will be your guide for your every need." The Mylar offered. "He is always helpful." That odd tone again. Janeway paused for a moment, then steeled herself to ask the question she'd been waiting to ask. "There's also another favour I would like to ask of you. Almost five months ago, a member of my crew was captured by the Mylkrie. We were told that he is in Vega Surelis. His name is Tom Paris. Lieutenant Tom Paris. We'd be more than glad if you could help us in this." For a moment, all was silent, then the Mylar nodded at Bahne. Bahne seem to hesitate, and Iolo shot a look at the Mylar - his actions indicating shock. They conferred silently for a moment, staring at one another. B'Elanna had a strong suspicion that they were communicating telepathically. Bahne hesitated a moment...and reached behind his mask - There was a swishing sound as the mask opened. Like petals of a flower, each layer of the mask slipped into nothingness, revealing hair so white it was silver and revealing a face- B'Elanna gasped, "Oh my God! Captain!" she cried. Chakotay tensed while Tuvok instinctively reached for his phaser. Bahne...was Lieutenant Tom Paris.

"What's the meaning of this?" Janeway snapped, turning her hot gaze at the Mylar. The Mylar stayed silent. Tom/Bahne meanwhile, made no effort to go to them, neither did he offer any explanations. In all appearances - he was the same Tom. But his eyes were a cold silver. And his hair - it was silver-white, and it reached his shoulders. "Tom!" Bellana cried, her control vanishing. No wonder he seemed familiar, his voice, the way he walked! "Tom, it's me, B'Elanna!" she reached for him. "No, B'Elanna." Chakotay held her back. "What are you doing?!" she snarled, wrenching her arms from his hands. "It's Tom, can't you see that?!" "You are mistaken," said Bahne/Tom. "I am not Tom." The sentinel fixed his eyes steadily on the half-Klingon. . "Tom...what did you do to him?!" B'Elanna snarled at the Mylar. Janeway did not protest her outburst - because she sure as hell wanted to know herself. "My eldest is right. He is not Lt. Tom Paris. I'm sorry we have to do it this way, Captain - I thought the masks would help." Slowly, the hundreds of Binoms unmasked themselves, each revealing a face that was a replica of Tom Paris. And when Janeway returned her gaze to the Mylar, she saw the eyes of Tom Paris looking back at her. B'Elanna clenched her fists, her heart thudded dangerously, filling with terror - terror for Tom. She heard a surprised grunt from Chakotay and could see Tuvok's eyes glint with suspicion. All the hundred replicas of Tom mocked her in their silence - all she felt now was rage; rage that they'd done this to Tom, rage that they'd possibly harmed him. "What did you do to him?! Why did you do this?" she snarled, her voice shaking, resisting her instinct to claw at the Mylar - at Tom. "I'm sorry I distressed you so, B'Elanna," The Mylar replied silkily, his hand reaching out for her hair. B'Elanna jerked away from his touch. He didn't seem to notice that. "Tom cared for you. I remember how he....loved you. Such a primitive emotion. But strong. And you Captain, how he respected and cherished you when nobody gave him a damn. I remember all of you, and I knew this would disturb you, but I, in all my good conscience, can not hide this fact from you." "The fact that you...cloned him? Used his cells? The others outside, are they clones too?" Janeway tried to maintain her calm, knowing that jumping to conclusions do not help at all. "Captain," the Mylar shook his head, as if disappointed at her statement. He turned away, walking to his throne. "Let me begin with a story that begun 10,000 years ago," he said after a moment, returning his silver gaze to them. "Back then, Surelis was a real planet and I was young, barely matured. Then they swept down on us. The Xyrons killed everyone. 20,000 Binom hives all destroyed, none were left unscathed. I was the only survivor of my race. It is perhaps, the fortune of my race that I matured into a myurin - the only one of my race that could breed. Since then, the only purpose of my life was to preserve the Binoms. My race." His silver eyes narrowed. "What I had to do - I did. After 10,000 years hiding in this sector, my children were slowly dying from the harsh radiation of its sun. Once, we were 5,000, now we are only 2000 over. Lieutenant Paris had cells that I needed, cells that could resist the radiation of the suns. Cells that could help the Binoms flourish again! He is our savior," he emphasised. "If he is your savior, where is he?!" B'Elanna snarled. Iolo shot the Mylar a look. "Mylar-" he protested. "Silence Iolo! We will tell them of his fate," he replied. There was a quiet menace to his voice. Iolo seem to shrink back in fear and dismay. Bahne remained unmoved, looking coolly ahead. "After escaping the Mylkrie, we found his shuttle. But you must understand - he did not really escape - merely allowed to escape. It is not unusual for the Mylkrie to hunt their victims for pleasure. It was luck indeed that Bahne found him, but our ...medical technology was insufficient to heal him. Iolo tried his best, but after a month with

us, Tom died from his wounds." His eyes, so very like Tom's, regarded her...coldly. They were expressionless, but to B'Elanna, they were leering at her - but she could not bring herself to hate him. He was too much like Tom. Chakotay looked down, shocked by the Mylar's announcement. Tom...dead? It did not seem possible. The Mylar looked sincere, then again... He looked at B'Elanna. She was as pale as her Klingon blood would allow her. Her eyes stared blankly ahead of her. "Where is his body?" the Captain asked, her voice strained. The Mylar gestured - his hands came together in a symbolic gesture of respect. "I am sorry Captain. We gave him our own burial rites after he died. His body was deployed into Vega Surelis' sun. We never expected you to come for him." "NO!! You're lying! You're hiding him! Tell me what you did to him!" Janeway stopped B'Elanna before she could throw herself at the Mylar. "Enough!" she commanded. "We'll speak about this later, lieutenant." She said sternly, glaring at the Engineer. She could see B'Elanna struggling with her emotions, breathing hard. She regarded the Mylar. "Mylar, I think we would like to return to our ship now." Her tone did not provide a refusal. "Well, as you may. You are free to wander in Surelis. May I offer Bahne as your escort?" "No thank you," Janeway replied curtly. Together, they left the throne room. They could feel all eyes on them as they left. As they left, B'Elanna memorized Iolo's features, trying to distinguish him from the others - for she wasn't just going to sit back. She was going to find him later - he clearly had something to say before. Tom isn't dead. She would know if he were. She would know if he were!

\* \* \* The Ready Room An hour later

"Well lieutenant. I'm certainly flattered by your attention," the Doctor muttered sarcastically. B'Elanna was doing some last minute adjustments to his portable holo- emitter. "Sorry Doctor," she replied, still engrossed with the repairs. "I would've done it earlier...I was just distracted." She would have reinitiated his program the moment they touched down in Surelis, but an overloaded holo-projector circuit wasn't one of her main worries then. Now the doctor provided a suitable diversion to her current...predicament. "Ah yes. The fact that we have 2000 over Paris clones beneath and around us right now." The doctor felt her tense. "Ensign Vorik updated me on the situation. Did distress you in some way?" B'Elanna snorted. "Distressed me? Why would I be worried of the 2000 over Paris look-a-likes? The fact that any of them could be Tom? The fact that they could've killed him when cloning him?!" she nearly punched a hole into the portable holo-emitter with her laser-drive. "Ouch! Be careful with that. Need I remind you-" "No you don't have to Doctor," she warned. "I ran a scan on some of our hosts, Lieutenant, and obtained very interesting DNA patterns. Not totally human, but quite. You may use it if you want. Their DNA patterns are the same. They're like twins. 2000 of them. It will not be hard to find Mr. Paris," he appeared quite pleased with himself. "Thanks Doctor." And she meant it, feeling sorry at her outburst earlier. "To tell you the truth Lieutenant Torres, I'm distressed." He sighed. "We are close to Tom, yet not close enough. It's amazingly ironic - that 5 months of search would lead to 2000 duplicates of him." thought B'Elanna wryly. The doors to the ready room slid open. The senior staff - minus Seven and noticeably, Tom Paris entered, followed by Janeway. "How are the repairs coming?" the Captain took the PADD Harry gave her and inspected it. "Very...slowly," the ensign frowned, a wry look on his face. "The Binoms are overly cautious and detailed, but I can't fault them on their expertise. The missing hull sections look brand new." Harry threw a quick look at B'Elanna. According to him, the Binoms

working on Voyager had unmasked themselves exactly the moment the Mylar revealed their little secret. It caused more than an uproar with the repair crew. "I nearly had a heart attack" he had said. "You don't know what I nearly got." B'Elanna muttered to him then.

"Slow?" Chakotay was saying. "I wonder if they're being overly cautious or merely keeping us here?" "A prospect I hope would not be true, Chakotay." Janeway replied, frowning. "Well...first thoughts on the Binoms?" she asked as she sat down. "I don't trust them!" B'Elanna answered almost instantly. She coloured almost immediately. "I'm sorry Captain, I'm just-" "I do not trust them either. In particular - their leader, the Mylar." Tuvok interrupted. They turned to him. "The Binoms seem to fear him," he added. "Does that fact make him a threat?" "He may not be a threat, but people who fear their leader hide secrets well." Tuvok observed. "Well, that's true." Janeway lifted an eyebrow. "I find it hard to trust his obvious good intentions...I have an illogical hunch-" she threw a wry glance at Tuvok. "-that they're hiding something from us. Other than the reasons for their masks, that is." "About Tom?" Harry asked, frowning terribly. "Most probably." Chakotay answered. "Most probably?" B'Elanna snarled. "They are hiding him from us! The 'burial rite' was a convenient excuse - his death is a convenient excuse! They did something to him, and they're not telling us what!" "So what do we do about it?" "Captain, I suggest an away team to investigate this matter. Since the Mylar is a feared figure, our investigation would be difficult, and delicate." Tuvok volunteered. "Good. Meanwhile, the Mylar has invited us for a-" she paused. "A feast." She finished. Commemorating Tom. We would do to attend."

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Janeway and the senior staff were dressed in formal dress uniforms, preferring its formality to casuals. They were not at ease with the Binoms, and Janeway wanted to show that they were in charge, despite their current position. Bahne greeted them at the entrance of what she supposed was the banquet hall. Janeway had learnt to distinguish him from the others by his regal stance and his Vulcan-like composure. Silently, he led them to the quiet hall. Food was laid on the table, but the disquieting fact remained that the Binoms - most of them, were still, staring blankly into nothingness. Some of them wore the same masks, others had removed it. "I will get to the point, Captain." Startled, Janeway turned. The Mylar entered, followed by another Binom. Iolo? Iolo regarded them silently, gazing at them with worry in his eyes. "Tom once told me that we are not an easy race to like," the Mylar replied, smiling as he descended the stairs. The Binoms around them turned to stare at the away team. "We remind you of the Borg." Janeway blinked at his burst of honesty. He voiced most of her suspicions already. "We are a hive-like race." Iolo volunteered. "But we are not the Borg. Our Collective mind may unnerve you, Captain, but I assure you, our intentions are good." "Why are you telling me all this? Why is trusting you so important?" Janeway wondered. "Because we honour Tom Paris. Because we want you to believe us that we did not harm him." The Mylar gestured to Bahne, who bowed and exited the room. He later returned with a bundle. He walked to B'Elanna, ignoring the Captain. "Tom Paris wanted you to have this, B'Elanna Torres." Bahne murmured his blue eyes limpid. Shaking, B'Elanna reached out for the bundle. "It's a holo-emitter?" she looked questioningly at Bahne. "A message, one which he made a week before he died." Bahne said, surprisingly gentle. It was at this

moment that B'Elanna saw Tom super imposed over Bahne; she mentally shook herself out of it. Not Tom. Tom's alive. Tom's not dead. He is not Tom... Without a thought, she activated it. Tom flashed her a grin - as solid as the Doctor, he reached out to touch her. He was wearing the black robes of the Binom, his hair was longer than usual - but it was certainly blonde, not white. There was something wrong though - he appeared pale and weak. He was certainly not the healthy Tom they knew. "I knew I'd see you again." The hologram said. "Tom?" she whispered. He flashed her his impish grin again. Then turned serious. "I'm sorry for how I left. I never properly said goodbye." "Goodbye?" she echoed stupidly. Tom reached out with his hand to touch her face. It felt warm... "I love you B'Elanna." His voice shook with emotion. "I'm just so sorry that I'll never be able to really touch you again." Tears simmered in his eyes. "I thought that you should just know that...I left a box of replicated flowers underneath my bed the day after we fought just in case I needed it later. Now," he took a deep breath to control his emotions. "It is too late for me, but not too late for you. I love you B'Elana. I hope you love the flowers-" His voice faded with the image. B'Elanna stared at the empty space the hologram left. She realized with a start that tears were coursing down her cheeks. "This is a trick," she whispered. "B'Elanna-" the Captain began. "No! Don't you see? He wants us to believe that Tom is dead! I don't believe it! He is NOT dead!" she threw the holo-emitter to the floor. She whirled away from them. From the Binoms that told her that she had found Tom - thousands of him, only none of them were him. "Well," the Doctor said as the half-Klingon disappeared from the room. "Anyone for dinner?"

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With trembling hands, she reached under his bed and searched blindly. Almost immediately, her hands felt a box. With her heart in her throat, she took it out and opened it. "Oh God, Tom," she whispered. In the box, lay the replicated flowers - the same flowers which he gave her for the first time a year ago. She remembered how he'd popped into the Jefferies tube and surprised her with it. Now this was all she had of him. "You're not dead. You can't be. If you were, I would know," she whispered brokenly, clutching it to her chest. B'Elanna Torres wept, tortured by the fact that she never managed to tell Tom...that she still loved him. \* \* \*

B'Elanna felt his hand. Chakotay's reflection played on the windows. She didn't turn. "I brought you the emitter. You may need it." B'Elanna turned to face the First Officer. As she took the holographic emitter in her hands, she felt its smooth, cold surface. "Is it damaged?" Her voice was surprisingly level. "Not a dent. The Binoms are good engineers." She managed a snort, studying the round device. "With Tom's genes, lets hope they stay that way." Her attempt at humor was a failed attempt. At the mention of Tom's name, she broke down. She buried her face in her hands, trying to hide her tears. Years of trained reserve at showing her feelings still prevailed, but with Chakotay she'll cut him some slack. Chakotay knelt down beside her on the bed and placed his arm around her shoulders. "We grieve for Tom, B'Elanna. The captain suggest that we hold a memorial service for him if you're up to it." "Then you believe it? That he is really dead?" she snapped, her eyes flaming. "After you left, The Mylar showed us the room where Tom stayed. It had 'Tom' written all over it." He smiled at that. "The Mylar regretted not keeping the body. He never thought that Voyager would



ever come by. The absence of the body makes it hard to believe the truth, but the Mylar was sincere. I think it is time to move on." B'Elanna stared at Chakotay with hard eyes then they softened and she nodded, defeated. "I never thought I'd lose him so quickly. Oh God Chakotay, never wait to say 'I love you'," she whispered brokenly. Chakotay gave her a sombre look and nodded, and with a last comforting pat on the shoulder, moved away.

\* \* \*

Comm officer's Personal Log. Stardate 530045.3. Tom's dead. I don't really think I want to believe that. But as I gave that eulogy at his memorial today, it finally hit me. I guess it was quite a touching eulogy. People laughed at the appropriate places - about the time he partnered with Seven against me and B'Elanna so that he could win at ping pong, and when he played the prank on Tuvok when he got promoted. Tom had always been the rebel with a good cause, me, I'm just good ol' Ensign Kim, polished, squeaky-clean Starfleet kid. B'Elanna showed little emotion at the memorial. She was the model of Klingon grief, as Megan Delaney said. But I know her. I could see tears threatening to get out each time she blinked. But B'Elanna is just too damned proud to let go. Rumour has it that only Chakotay have the privilege to see her cry. Yeah Tom, I promise I'll take care of her. Don't let her hear that though. She'll bite your head off that Maquis. {A pause and a sigh}. I miss you Tom, and if you can hear me, just know that I'll never forget you. {A pause} You're the best friend a pal could ever have.

\* \* \* Surelis Four days later

"Repairs are proceeding according to schedule and we would be ready to depart in a week. Crews have been dispatched to gather materials for Voyager. The Mylar has kindly supplied us gallacite, food - Neelix is having a field day with their rich variety of vegetables." Janeway sighed, pausing her log for a moment. She couldn't pretend to sound upbeat even if there was a phaser to her head. She continued her log. "B'Elanna is naturally distraught over Tom's death, and the Doctor mentioned that he caught her watching the holographic message over and over again. I'm afraid for her psychological well being, as do all of us. Even after the memorial service she found it difficult to move on." She ended her log. Katherine had thought Tom Paris too cocky on the day she met him at the New Zealand colony. And she had felt more than disappointment that day - she'd felt a tinge of anger on how he'd betrayed his father's trust in him by joining the Marquis. But she had not known him then; but once she got to know him, Katherine realized that all he ever wanted was approval - especially from Admiral Paris; which he never really got. She knew the Admiral; therefore she knew how stingy he was when it came to praise. He was naturally harder on his son than on others. She contemplated on how she would tell the Admiral about his son's death. "He was a fine officer, Admiral. He would have made you proud." The past tense in her message would be a final nail to the coffin in the life of Thomas Eugene Paris. In her mind, she saw him laughing at a pool win at Sandrines, hanging out with Harry and B'Elanna at the mess hall, sharing jokes in Neelix' resort...her mind returned to the time where she told him that he was a lieutenant. "For the first time in my life...I don't know what to say!" he had exclaimed. "You've earned this, Tom. I'm only sorry your father won't know." "He'll know," he promised her then. "When we get back." He had grinned. Janeway closed her eyes. When we get back. She fingered her log. she

frowned and her thoughts shifted to the Binom leader. < I still don't trust the Mylar. And B'Elanna did voice her doubts; No body, no evidence that he died. We need a better reason for his death!> "Let the log note," she continued, "That Commander Chakotay and Lieutenant Tuvok will be sent to investigate the matter of Lieutenant Paris'...apparent demise. I am not satisfied with the explanation that the Mylar gave me. End log."

\* \* \*

Chief Engineer's Personal Log. Stardate 53046.6. I'm trying to deal with Tom's death. Not having success so far. Everyone has been annoyingly concerned; everyone up to the Doctor, who recommended that I take off from duty. As if I'll let him win. I try to do more now, read more ships schematics or repair more conduits that don't need repairing. But I can't get my mind off his smile. His eyes. His memories. It's everywhere you see. And as I cleaned out his room last night, I realised that I've not made peace with his ghost. Every piece of clothing, every sketch of his damn 20th century machines scream out his name. He wouldn't leave me alone. I studied his personal logs yesterday. And in it was a letter he wrote to his father, the Admiral, when he was hauled to the brig for thirty days over a year ago. I decided that the letter was incomplete, and decided to write a letter of my own to the grand Admiral. But I felt like an imposter. I never finished it.

\* \* \* Private Quarters 235 0125 hours

Exhausted, B'Elanna slept in her bed. She had poured her heart and soul in her engineering work, overseeing repairs like a hellion. One thing she'd refused was to venture out into Surelis again. Seeing all the other 'Tom's'; they seem to be mocking his death. Her only solace was the hologram, which managed to only to repeat what he said the day before. It was good enough. Just good enough. Her eyes closed, forcing unshed tears away. She was not the type to cry...Tom would have wanted her to be strong.

"I used to come here with my family during summer time, looking at the San Francisco bridge from this hill. Oh, how Jenny would moan about the sun getting to her skin. She couldn't wait for dad to finish his lectures at the academy." "It's beautiful." She whispered, looking at the bridge, the seas, and Starfleet academy. The cool wind swept her hair behind. "Yeah, it is." Tom smiled, looking at her. "So are you," he leaned forward, and they kissed. He felt warm...and real. "Wait. Something's wrong." She broke away. She looked deeply into his blue eyes. Something hit her and she found herself saying: "Tom? Tom, tell me you're not dead." "Dead? Really, I didn't think you'd hate me so much," he teased. "Please, tell me. You're not dead are you?" she felt insecure and unsure, as if what she saw was an illusion, not a living breathing man. He looked at her seriously, then clutched her arm. "I'm not dead, B'Elanna. Believe me." "Yeah...yeah, I do," she found herself crying all over again. "I'm so glad you're not gone. I thought you were! What a strange dream! I can't bear to loose you, you pig. I love you." She wrapped her arms around him. "I love you too B'Elanna. Remember what I say - no matter what they tell you, I'm not dead," he whispered harshly. She reached out for him, but her hand clutched at nothing! He started to fade. Her eyes widened. "No! Tom! I can't loose you again! Tom!"

B'Elanna gasped and sat up. The darkness of her room greeted her.

"Tom..." she whispered.

\* \* \* Sickbay 1145 hours

The Doctor frowned at Naomi. The half Ktarian child was pale and weak. She coughed repeatedly. "There doesn't appear to be a virus." The Doctor announced, puzzled. Ensign Wildman frowned, twisting her hands in anxiety. "What's wrong with her?" "Well, her immune system-" he sighed as he ran a medical tricorder over the child. "I have no better way to call it but to say that it has been compromised. Weakened somewhat. T-cells are down..." He trailed off and frowned again. "I'm sorry Ensign, I cannot give you an accurate answer to this. You'll have to come back in five hours when I finish running a complete cellular scan." He turned to Naomi, forcing a smile on his face, trying to wipe out Ensign Wildman's distressed face. "Well, Naomi, looks like you'll be staying in this resort for a while." "No that's not true! Tom said that the sickbay was a prison," Naomi volunteered helpfully. She smiled in delight. Despite her sickness, Naomi's spirit still soared. "Well." He replied, deadpan. "He did, did he? Well, we'll see about that!" he tried to smile reassuringly. "Ensign Wildman, do not worry. I'll do the best I can." She nodded, holding back her tears for the sake of her daughter. She gave her daughter a brave smile and kissed her on the cheek. "You know you're a brave girl, don't you, darling?" "Yes mommy," Naomi replied seriously. "I will be brave for you." The Doctor watched as mother and daughter embraced, and he frowned. \* \* \*

"You sent for me, Mylar?" The shadows in the Sanctuary was deep. There was no light to guide him along, but he felt the telepathic pull of the Call. "Yes..." came the whispered reply. Bahne moved to the Mylar, feeling the telepathic pull of his command. The telepathic pull of the one that created you. Borne you. "The Voyager crew...they have not discovered-?" "No." Bahne looked down, feeling his heart ache. To do this again, after Tom Paris... From the shadows, he could see the Mylar's silver eyes turn to slits of red. "Do you regret what you did, Bahne? Did you regret saving them? Perhaps that you should've let the Mylkrie have them?" he asked harshly. Bahne gathered himself, placing his mental blocks in place again- "No, sire." The Mylar hissed, and Bahne knew he did so because of the mental blocks he had just placed. He couldn't stand being shut out from his children. "The Children of Surelis will once more prosper, sire. We have no need of this." Bahne continued, making sure his mental blocks are up. His earlier slip will not happen again. "I know they will!!" The Mylar roared. Bahne flinched as the Mylar flung himself off his throne. He landed gently two feet away before him. "But what is the point when they shut themselves off their creator? Their Mylar?! The one that borne them? Can't you feel it, Bahne?!" he hissed, inches away from his face. "They are rebelling against me!" Bahne looked down, refusing to see the mad glint in his eyes. "No sire. They remain loyal to you. They are your children." "Children? They are bastards! They are not mine! They are all bastards!!" he turned away, feeling the etchings on the ancient wall roughly. Bahne watched the Mylar feel the carvings on the wall - one that the Mylar did himself. The Mylar had told him before he became this way- Bahne looked away, feeling tears behind his eyes. Once again, it surprised him. These - emotions. "I'm sorry Bahne." The Mylar whispered after a moment. There was a smile on his face. "What came over me?" "Nothing, sire," he answered mechanically. The Mylar gave him an affectionate pat on his cheek. He walked to his throne. "Always so obedient. I know it hurts you, Bahne," he whispered gently

as he approached the throne. "I know it hurts you - what you must do to Voyager, but if you want to save them-" he turned sharply to him. "-you know what to do." He snarled. "Doing so will destroy us." Bahne reasoned. "You coward!" the Mylar roared. "You'd rather let them die?!" Bahne turned, walking away from the Mylar, walking away from the madness of their lives. And all the while, he kept his eyes closed - for he could not bear to see the etchings on the wall that reminded him of what he should do. \_ He heard the Mylar say telepathically.

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### Chapter 3...Revelations

Day 7 on Surelis Former Quarters of Lt. Paris 0956 hours

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing." Chakotay muttered. "I'm afraid I have to concur, Commander." Tuvok frowned, decidedly displeased. He shifted his wrist light around the room. Paris' room was sparse, barely decorated. The only evidence that this was once his quarters were the copious drawings made by Paris - mostly on ship schematics and various automobiles of the 20th century. Chakotay thought wryly. Tom's former quarter overlooked a street. The 'Toms'(as Chakotay will call them privately) were walking stoically to unknown destinations, their eyes blank, each engaged in their specific duties and carrying it out like loyal automatons. "From my judgement, and if this is indeed a hive-like race, I would gauge that these are drones," Tuvok noted after watching him observe the Binoms. "Drones..." Chakotay muttered, looking at the 'Toms' working silently at one corner, apparently lifting some objects. "Like worker bees." He continued. Their initial assessment that this was to be a difficult investigation proved too true. The 'drones' do not talk, nor do they acknowledge them. They have not met any of the Binoms that would (or could) talk to them; there is no sign of Bahne nor Iolo and a thorough investigation of Tom's living quarters on Surelis came up with nothing. "Perhaps Lieutenant Paris is really deceased, Commander." Tuvok frowned. "We have not come up with any evidence that he isn't." "Or is. Everything is arranged for us here. So neatly it's like an exhibit. I don't know about you, but perfect evidence makes me suspicious." Tuvok raised an eyebrow. "I'm not willing to let it go, Tuvok. Apparently the Captain doesn't either. My instincts tell me that something is not right-" "Perhaps you are unable to accept his death, Commander, and are looking for clues that are not there." Tuvok was too polite to say that he was being illogical. "Perhaps," Chakotay answered, picking up Tom's sketches. In the beginning he'd been convinced that Lieutenant Paris was dead. But for the past two days he had had strange dreams, and his spirit guide had told him that the wolf could wear sheep's clothing. "Even the faces of former friends could be enemies," she had warned him. It had filled him with disquiet ever since. Suddenly, a sharp light caught his attention. "What was that?" Tuvok pointed his light to a corner of the room. There was nothing there. Another sound - this time to the right. Chakotay nearly got a shock when he saw Paris standing there - until he saw the flare of light catching the silver-whiteness of the Binom's hair. A red diamond marking stood out on his forehead. "What are you doing here?" the Binom asked. "We were told that we could take his belongings." Chakotay volunteered. The Binom did not acknowledge Chakotay's statement. "You are to come with me," he said instead. "Why? We have not done anything wrong, have we?" Chakotay asked, immediately suspicious. "No, Commander. You are not safe here." Tuvok raised an eyebrow. The Binoms were often startlingly honest. "And why do you say that?" Tuvok challenged. "There are many

things you do not know of Surelis." The Tom look-a-like answered. "It is better that you follow me." Chakotay exchanged glances with Tuvok, and he found himself nodding. whispered the voice of his spirit-guide. The Binom waited. Reason won out. "Let's go. We shouldn't keep him waiting." Chakotay followed the Binom. And soon, the room was left cold and empty once more.

From the corner of the room, silver eyes flared to life.

\* \* \*

B'Elanna worked at her repairs blankly this time. Engineering members worked busily around her; but they were background noises, wall paper for all she cares. Mariah Henley handed her something on the way to her destination, but she didn't know what it was nor what she should do with it. She knew she was distracted, and she knew what it was, but she couldn't shake off the feeling of overwhelming loss that engulfed her just a few hours ago. "Stupid dream." she muttered, trying to work up the courage to growl it away as nonsense. But no, it was a good dream. A damn good one. It felt real. He *was* there. Tears fought to come out, but B'Elanna forced it back. She had had these vivid dreams for two days in a row now. Sometimes she was even awake. A waking dream? Isn't that what they called them? She would've gone to Chakotay for help on this, but he was off with Tuvok investigating...Tom's death. The dreams varied, but they all came out the same. Tom would warn her not to trust anyone else but herself, and that he was not dead. Even in death he was driving her crazy. She had resisted the impulse to go to the Doctor, knowing what he'll do - put her off duty, demanding her to rest and stop thinking about Tom. Make her feel as if she was going crazy. "It's time to accept it, time to accept it," she muttered to herself. Tom is dead. He's not coming back. Tom is dead. B'Elanna sighed and climbed into the Jeffries Tube, wondering which gel pack had ruptured during the fight with the Mylkrie. Nothing is more tedious than tracking down a damaged gel pack in the tunnels of Voyager. She flipped her tricorder open. "B'Elanna?" a voice called from behind. She froze. "B'Elanna?" "You're not real!" she snapped, whirling around, preparing to deck whoever who had audacity to- -And faced a tunnel of darkness. She could only gasp, looking at the looming darkness before her. It was a tunnel, its walls were engraved with carvings, and in a distance, she heard footsteps. Quickly, she tapped her commbadge. "Voyager! Can you read me? Voyager?!" Phaser, damn it! She didn't bring a phaser! And her hands were curiously empty. Henley had given her something...that thought floated away like a feather. "Whoever you are! You better come out now! You don't want to mess with a Klingon that has been kidnapped!" she snarled. There was no response. When she removed her hand from the wall she saw the carving of an alien face staring back at her. It was the strangest, and the most beautiful being she had ever seen. The creature was a tall, with a vague humanoid shape. It had wings, and it swept down to cover its face - talon-like hands clutched each other. Only its silver eyes were visible. she thought. "It's a story." She whirled around, breathing heavily. "Who is this? Come out!" "B'Elanna, you know who I am." It teased, the voice achingly familiar. From the darkness, a hand emerged from the darkness, gripping hers gently. She tried to back away from the warm touch of the hands, but she didn't feel threatened by it. They gripped her with a familiar pressure. A familiar way, and she knew if she looked up, it will be- "You're not real." She whispered, her voice shaking. She didn't look up. "Stop doing this to me!" The hand tipped her chin up. "You use to love it when I touched you this way,"

Tom whispered, kissing the underside of her hand. He smiled that cocky smile of his and his blue eyes sparkled. Suddenly, she didn't feel frightened any longer, or anything at all for that matter. She felt as if she was a single cork in the big, blue sea... floating, without a care in the world, staring up at the star studded sky, and at the carvings that floated around them. All she had was Tom, and she was content. "What are they?" she found herself asking aloud. Another carving of the beautiful creature passed her. "They were the Binoms." "They're beautiful." She murmured sleepily as she saw another float past her. Another carving floated past her, then passed her again, as if she was turning a circle. One depicted a Binom over another smaller one. It grasped the smaller Binom protectively, like a mother would. She smiled at that image. The next image showed the large Binom presiding over a host of other small Binoms - like a King. "It's the Mylar, isn't it?" "Yes," whispered Tom, close to her ear. "What you see is the Cycle of Life. Look and understand. Look and remember-" The next carving that floated past made her gasp. The Mylar had clutched its child - only this time, it wasn't at all motherly. "It's killing it? But why?" Tom did not answer. She turned around to see him, but all she could see were the carvings. And she saw the next carving depicting the same thing until there were a multitude of the exact same carving - parent killing child, mother slaughtering child. It sickened her, yet, part of her felt that it was alright, that it was normal and had been happening for thousands and thousands of years. "The Cycle of Life." Tom answered for her, agreeing completely with her last thread of thought. Suddenly, she felt her feet again. Dizzily, she swayed, clutching the carved wall. "What the- what happened?" Tom placed his hand lightly on her lips. "Be quiet, he'll hear you," he whispered intently, his blue eyes glinting with apprehension. She heard footsteps, not so distant, coming. "Who?" Tom leaned close to her and whispered in her ear. "My father," he whispered. The footsteps were definitely louder now. Breathing heavily, B'Elanna stood her ground, determined to meet whatever creature was coming. She heard something thud against the wall of the tunnel. Rocks tumbled furiously. The pounding happened again. From the darkness, a man emerged. Grey hair streaked hair that was once dark blonde. Cold blue eyes, hard from years of battles stared out from the darkness. The man's lips were a thin line of determination and he caught her eye, and pointed at her. B'Elanna knew who it was. The man Tom had spoken elusively about, the man where 'things had gone wrong' between them. It was Admiral Paris. Tom had once shown her his picture - albeit after much persuasion. "This is not right. He's not supposed to be here," She said to herself, but she could only watch. Admiral Paris gave her a cursory glance and lifted the great hammer and brought it down on the wall. It shattered in slow motion, and the ancient Binoms became dust. One by one, the images that she saw shattered, and she heard him say, "Useless, useless, useless." And the hammer descended on a carving, and when it shattered, B'Elanna realized that the carving was- Voyager.

A hand gripped her shoulder-

Instinctively, B'Elanna swung her fist- "Hey! B'Elanna! It's me!" "Harry?" she gasped and looked around. She was back on Voyager. But she wasn't in Engineering. She was somewhere on Deck Two, near the mess hall. She looked at her right hand. She held a hydrocoil spanner. She would've made a fine mess out of Harry if he hadn't stopped her. "What happened, Harry?" "I don't know." He replied, concerned "I saw you looking at the computer controls. You seemed lost in thought. You didn't answer when I called you, so I shook you.

Next thing I knew-" B'Elanna could only stare at him. "B'Elanna, is something wrong?" Harry asked, concerned.

\* \* \* Sickbay 1014 hours

"And you dreamt of him? When?" "Yesterday. And the day before that. More times that I could remember." B'Elanna replied, staring at the light at the end of the neuro scanner. "Hmph." The Doctor complained. "I see no neural damage." "Shouldn't you be relieved?" B'Elanna replied sarcastically. "I am relieved, but I was hoping you could explain the current condition of the crew." The Doctor sighed, putting away his instruments. "What do you-" "B'Elanna," Janeway interrupted. "How often have you had these waking dreams?" "A few times. And each time everything was very real." B'Elanna let out an exasperated sound. "And I saw things that I have not seen before." "Lieutenant, you have lately been preoccupied with the death of Lieutenant Paris. It is not unusual to have such vivid dreams." The Doctor said gently. "If you think I'm seeing things, think again. I'm \*not\* hallucinating!" B'Elanna snapped. "Well, Lieutenant. I wish I could listen to you now, but as you can see, I have more pressing engagements to go after." He gestured towards the Captain who was now standing beside a sick crewman. B'Elanna regarded the fully occupied sickbay, and for once she stopped thinking about her problem. "Do you know what's wrong with them?" she looked at the Doctor. "I don't know." The Doctor answered. He appeared to be frustrated. "It started with Naomi, and the next thing I knew, 50 crewmen reported sick and the number does not seem to decrease." "What are the symptoms so far, Doctor?" Janeway asked when she returned to his side. "General weakness, nausea; but most noticeably, their immune system has been compromised. Their bodies are fighting against bacteria that are normally harmless in their bodies. Have you been displaying any of these symptoms, Captain?" The Captain did not answer, but her expression said it all. "Then you must stay here for a-" "No Doctor, I'm afraid not," she ignored his annoyed expression. "Do we have an epidemic on our hands?" "Well Captain. I don't think so. At least not in the way you're thinking. The source of the illness does not appear to be viral." He brought them over to his medical console. "For the past 24 hours, I've been working hard to find out the cause of the illness. I ran about every scan imaginable; then it occurred to me, why not run a scan of the environment?" Janeway lifted an eyebrow. "The cause of the illness came from Voyager?" "No Captain. It came from Surelis." Now two eyebrows rose. "Radiation?" "Exactly." He showed them readings on the computer screen. "Radiation waves that I've not seen before. They are slowly running down the cellular structure of your cells. If we stay in Surelis any longer, the crew will be too weak to even stand. Or do anything else for that matter." "I've not been displaying any symptoms." B'Elanna said, getting off the biobed. "In the course of my investigation, I discovered that humans are more susceptible to the radiation. You are half Klingon. Perhaps your body chemistry compensated for it, but it would not last long - judging from the waking dreams that you've been having." "I don't believe that the dreams are part of the symptoms," B'Elanna replied defensively. "But we must consider that-" "No Captain. I'm telling you. These dreams are telling me something. I saw a wall with carvings, and Tom - the person in my dream," she corrected, "-told me about the history of the Binoms. And the last thing I saw was Voyager being destroyed." The Captain did not appear convinced. "Why are you the only one who seem to have these dreams?" "I don't know Captain. But we shouldn't ignore them. The Binoms are telepathic, aren't they? Perhaps someone is trying to warn us?" "I will take that into

consideration. Meanwhile, I have to contact the Mylar on this situation. I know we don't trust him, none of us do, but right now our lives depend on him." B'Elanna watched her go, her eyes bright.

\* \* \*

"Ah! Commander Chakotay, Lieutenant Tuvok. Welcome." Chakotay resisted the urge to cough. The room they were in was dusty and dark. "Who are you?" The Binom that greeted them smiled. "I'm Iolo. The Healer of Surelis. You want to know what happened to Paris, yes?" Chakotay lifted an eyebrow. He had not voiced his intention to anyone. "It's not hard to know," Iolo replied, obviously reading his mind. "Your forays into Paris' rooms are enough. Do you want a drink?" "No thank you," Chakotay looked around in the room. Binoms were everywhere, but they did not seem to engage in any activity. They sat down listlessly, sometimes occupying themselves by talking to each other. They appeared almost...human. Iolo noticed his look. "You're wondering why we're different from the rest?" It was not a question. "Well, I'll tell you." Iolo said after a moment of silence. He gestured to one of the Binoms. Iolo turned the head of the Binom, revealing a line of blue markings that ran down the side of his head - it looked almost like the spots of a Trill. They have seen the markings on most of the drones outside. "Keyla here is a drone." Iolo exclaimed proudly. Keyla smiled shyly - it was a replica of Tom's cocky smile. "But he is different. Like the rest of them here, he's different from the ones that are outside." Iolo whispered intently. "Do you know why?" "No." Chakotay answered. "They have the freedom of choice." Iolo cried. He appeared fascinated with the idea. "For years, they've followed the instructions of the Mylar like a dutiful slave, never questioning, never disobeying. But then, we were given new bodies after our deep sleep, and then, everything changed. They began to voice their suspicions. Are we doing the right thing? They began to ask themselves. And what do they get? They get killed for their efforts." Iolo's words sounded like a revolutionary's, but he stated them flatly, as if reciting from a book. "This is the legacy that Tom Paris gave us," he said mournfully, closing his eyes. "And they are here, to hide?" Tuvok asked. "Yes." Iolo replied. "Even now, the Mylar hunts them. People like Keylar here has shut their minds off from the Mylar, hoping that he would not find them, but the Mylar is Changing now. There's no stopping the Cycle of Life." "The Cycle of Life?" Chakotay tore his eyes from a Binom with red markings. "The Mylar borne us, he gave us life, but at the end of his life span, he will Change, and when he Changes, he will kill his off-spring. This will signify the end of the old hive and the beginning of a new one. Now, the Mylar knows only to kill. It is an instinct borne of a race that could live for thousands and thousands of years. Only a myurin can defeat him; and usually it takes more than twenty of them to kill him. Once, there were a hundred over myurins to challenge him, now they is only one. Challenging the Mylar now will mean the extinction of our race. The Mylar knew all that, and thought that the cells of Tom Paris would break this cycle and gave the hive more myurins, but it failed, and now he is angry - at Voyager, at all of you, and he wants all of you dead." "Why are you telling me this? Are you ...some sort of rebel?" "A rebel Chakotay? You mean a romantic revolutionary?" Iolo laughed shortly. "Unlike your race, we do not...revolutionize. No, we are only trying to survive, Commander and to repay a debt of honour." "Paris." Tuvok stated. Iolo nodded gravely. He was silent for a long moment, exchanging knowing glances with another Binom. The other Binom closed his eyes and shook his



head, as if remembering a sad event. "He gave us back our life," Iolo said after a moment. "We were dying when he came. He gave us the freedom of choice. It was a cruel thing...what the Mylar did to him." Chakotay held his breath. "Iolo. Tell me what happened to Paris...is he alive?" Beside him, Tuvok remained impassive, but he was frowning now. Iolo closed his eyes, as if remembering a distant dream. "He was called one day by the Mylar. Bahne and I led him to the throne room, knowing perfectly that all was not well. We could feel the thirst of killing in the mind of the Mylar. But we never stopped Paris, never warned him. We didn't know how. We've obeyed the Mylar all our lives!" His eyes opened, and they were blurred with tears. "We felt his pain," he whispered. "Did he...was he killed?" Chakotay swallowed. "He lives." Iolo answered shortly. Chakotay sighed in relief, but Iolo interrupted him, raising a hand, his silver eyes hard. "But only Bahne knows where he is." He looked up directly into Chakotay's eyes, and Chakotay saw sadness in them. "I am sorry that fate has led us to you, Commander. And I grieve for Paris who came to the wrong place at the wrong time. Now, return to your ship. Leave Surelis, there is nothing you can do here, and the longer you stay, the more you forfeit your life." He said intensely. "What are you talking about?" Chakotay asked, his eyes narrow with confusion. "Just do as I say." Iolo pressed, his eyes intense. Suddenly, the room fell silent. Iolo stiffened, his silver eyes wide. Chakotay looked around uncomfortably. He knew something unexplainable was going on, and although he was not a telepath, he could feel the hairs at the back of his neck rising. "He hears you," Tuvok said suddenly. "You are linked with the Mylar?" "We all are. But we try shut our minds from him, but it is only this much that we could do." Chakotay wanted Iolo to say more, but the Binom's tone had a desperate edge to it. Chakotay decided to let it go, and nodded once in acknowledgement. "Jora here will lead you out," Iolo motioned to the one that brought them here. There was nothing more to be said between them, Iolo's gaze said. Iolo's voice came in his head. Chakotay and Tuvok turned, fixing their eyes on the Healer's. came the voice again. "I make no promises. Not yet," Chakotay said after a moment. With that, he nodded and followed Jora silently out of the hideaway. From the darkness, a figure approached the Healer. Iolo merely acknowledged the newcomer with a slight glance. The Binoms around them fell silent at the approach of the newcomer, casting the new member respectful glances. "He is coming for you," said the figure. \_ Iolo answered telepathically, watching the departing figures. this time, he looked into the eyes of his sibling. Bahne answered; and wondered why his heart felt heavy. Iolo watched him intently, and Bahne knew that he was trying to probe into his mind, looking for the answer - but Bahne had more time to learn how to cover up his mind than Iolo did. A few hundred years more. Iolo watched his older sibling depart. For seven thousand years, Bahne had been the loyal henchman of the Mylar. Iolo wondered whether Bahne was brave enough to do what he must. Or give in to the Mylar's demands? he heard the Mylar call suddenly, a loud voice thundering in the silence of his mind. Around him, his charges roused, terrified. puzzled the voice. Iolo answered. \_

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\_ "No reply from the Mylar, Captain," said Ensign Rees. She was visibly pale and she was panting. "Ensign Rees-?" Janeway was about to query when the young science officer collapsed. B'Elanna rushed to her side immediately, feeling for a pulse. "She's burning up with fever!" B'Elanna cried. "Janeway to the doctor-" she began when she felt her vision swim dangerously. The next thing she knew, she heard

Harry's voice next to her face. "Captain." Harry whispered, propping her up. "What's going on?" she managed. "I don't know!" B'Elanna coughed as she activated the sensors. "The radiation waves are becoming more intense. It has increased by 300% in the last minute! It's poisoning us!" "Captain!" "Chakotay? Where are you?" Janeway tapped her badge. "We have to leave Surelis, Captain. We're in danger." "No kidding." Janeway got to her feet - albeit shakily. "Prepare for transport-" she panted a little. "-Commander." "Ackn-" The transmission ended with a sharp cry. "Chakotay?" her eyes widened. "Harry! Report!" "The sensors show that they have not moved!" "Transport them immediately." "The transporters are not responding!" B'Elanna cried out in frustration. "Our computer subroutine is being taken over!" "By what?!" \_

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\_ Lieutenant Carey was overseeing repairs on the last missing hull when his vision swam. Around him, he heard crewmen moan and collapse. He clutched the hull for support, seeing the lights of Surelis swim around him. "You there - Mielta?" he called out to the nearest Binom. The Binom stood rooted to his spot, watching him intensely. They have been working together for 5 days now, and he found him quiet but almost gentle. It was unnerving to work with the 'doppelganger' of Tom, but he found that he could trust him. "Help me, Mielta!" He thought about his kids back home, wondering what happened to dad. He thought of dying on Surelis as his breath refused to come. He must have fallen, for he saw Mielta above him. "Mielta..." he called out again, breathless. He could not draw out a breath. Mielta merely gazed at him for a moment, then opened his hand with his palm facing his face. Carey's eyes widened. Tentacles writhed on the palm, slithering on the wrist, holding a silver disc-like object to his palm. The silver light brightened- And Carey felt a sharp pain as the weapon discharged. \* \* \* \_

\_ Harry tried to reach for his phaser, but the Binom was faster than he was. B'Elanna watched in horror as he fell back from the weapon discharge. The Binom turned his head and walked to her purposefully. "Over my dead body!" he hit it across the head as hard as she could. She heard a visible crunch and saw silver blood splatter on the floor. The Binom looked stunned that he was hit, he touched the side of his face - it came back bloody with silver blood. He appeared faintly puzzled. Tom's eyes blinked back at her. her mind cried. Her Klingon mother would have admonished her; fight like a Klingon, you p'tahk! They had appeared out of nowhere, materializing all over the ship in a matter of seconds. One minute they were reeling from the effects of the radiation, the next - they were being boarded. To date, there were around a hundred Binoms on the ship - the crew, incapacitated by the radiation was taken over easily. Grunting, she hauled herself off the hole and rolled into sickbay. "Lieutenant!" the doctor cried sharply. "I'm glad to see you! The Binoms are trying to break in!" he helped her up. B'Elanna heard the sharp sound of energy discharge from outside. Hoping that the doctor understood, she moved over to the transporter console in sickbay. Used only for intra-beaming, the transporter consoles would need reconfiguring. "What are you doing, lieutenant?" "Getting us out of here." "What about the Captain? Surely you're not abandoning-" "No!" she cried brusquely. "It's Chakotay and Tuvok! They're still down there, I can't leave them there. And Tom, Tom could be-" "Listen to me, Lieutenant! Tom is dead!" B'Elanna decked him before she knew what she was doing. Fortunately, the Doctor phased out in time.

"Lieutenant!" he cried out in horror after he rematerialized. "Sorry," she growled, returning to her console. "The ship is useless. Its subroutine is being taken over. Even a simple replicator command won't work now. I'm hoping that the sickbay's emergency buffers would hold out." The sickbay computers were programmed to hold out longer than the rest of the ship. She growled in triumph. "I was right! It did hold out!" The door slammed open. The Doctor and B'Elanna looked up in shock as four Binoms appeared through the door, all masked. They raised their hands- -in time for B'Elanna and the Doctor to be taken by the transporter. \_

\_ The crew resisted little, and by ten minutes, all were disabled. A figure entered the bridge, looking around. "Two have escaped," said one of the Binoms. A red diamond mark on his forehead designated him as a Soldier. Another acknowledged that quietly. The other Binoms stepped aside as he approached the bridge, revealing the slumped figure of the female Captain. And Bahne watched her. He has done what he must. \_

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\_ Conflicting thoughts were racing in Janeway's head at that moment. A part of her insisted that she was back home, lounging in the sun with her dog, Molly. The sun was getting too hot- it's time to get up or not you'll get a bad sun burn. Another part said that it would be more than a sun burn. With a start, her eyes opened. Bahne looked down at her. She told herself to breathe slowly as her mind raced to find a way out. She had been stunned by one of the strange palm-like devices, she remembered. As her vision cleared, she saw around twenty or so Binoms behind Bahne. "Why?" she had to know. "He hates you." Bahne answered as if it explained everything. "The Mylar thinks that humans would be the cause of our extinction." "We did nothing to you to justify that!" She felt strong enough to shout now. "And Tom did nothing either." From his tone, Janeway knew that Tom was harmed after all. "Oh he did something alright. He provided you a means to live. And after he expended his usefulness you decided to kill him, didn't you?" Bahne cocked his head aside. "Don't you remember, Captain? I have promised never to harm you - or any of your crew." He must have detected her fear. "And what is this?" she gestured to her fallen crew, some trying to rouse. Most of them were moaning in pain. "You call this a promise?" she shot back. "No. I call this - 'helping you'." Beside her, Harry Kim stood up, rubbing his neck gingerly. Ensign Rees followed, allowing herself a stretch. One by one, her crew woke up, none worse for wear. They appeared - - better than before. She looked questioningly at Bahne. "We inoculated you against the poison." Bahne explained. "You must flee now, Captain. Leave Surelis. Never return again. I will try keep the Mylar busy until you get your computers online again." Her mind worked, trying to handle the fact that Bahne wasn't there to kill her. Then she remembered Chakotay and Tuvok. "My first officer and chief of security. They're still down there." Bahne exchanged glances with a soldier. "Leave them. They have little chance of surviving." "If there's any part of Tom left in you, you would know that I never give up. And that I never leave \*anyone\* behind." Janeway insisted. Bahne smiled - the first she'd ever seen. For a moment, his resemblance to Tom was so startling that she found her resolve faltering. "I know. Tom often told me about 'his Captain'. If you want to find them, you would have to follow me. Meanwhile, I would advice your crew to take care of the

computer virus. You may need the ship sooner than you think." \_

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\_ They materialized in a cavern. B'Elanna found herself frowning as she checked her tricorder. "Where are we?" the Doctor asked, looking around the dark cavernous pit they were in. "I...I don't know." "Excuse me?" the Doctor was shocked. "I entered some co-ordinates. The next thing I know, we're here. It's as if my mind was told what\* to enter," she shook her head to clear the remaining cobwebs in her head. "Lieutenant, may I recommend that you-" "Not now, doctor." She snapped brusquely, waving her tricorder around her. "They're here!" she cried suddenly. Two life signs - a human and a vulcan. "Where?" "800 meters from here." She said breathlessly as she rushed forward. "Lieutenant! Wait!" she heard the doctor cry out behind her. \_

\_ She didn't know if she ran or walked, but she was getting closer to the signals. The doctor's cries had faded somewhere in the background of her mind. Then she heard it. Shivering, B'Elanna tapped her comm badge. "Doctor, can you hear me?" No answer. She looked around. She was alone in what appeared to be a huge cavern. Huge, rocky, stalagmites and stalactites protruded around the cavern, creating tunnels that stretched on almost forever. What possessed her to run like that? It was as if some inner demon had prodded her on, and she couldn't stop it. "Please! Help me!" Breathing deeply, she told herself that she was hearing things, that again, it was a dream - a waking dream. "Please! Help me! If you can hear me-" She cannot, cannot ignore it! It's him, this time - its HIM! "I'm coming Tom!" she looked around the cavern, tripping on some rocks. "Tell me where you are!" "B'Elanna? Oh God, B'Elanna! Is that you?" the voice echoed around the cavern, making it hard to pinpoint. The cry was desperate, on an edge. She smelled the sharp, acrid smell of blood. Human blood. "I'm coming!" she called. His voice came on the left. "Hurry!" Tom urged her, panic-stricken. "He's coming!" Something told her she didn't want to know. "Keep talking, Tom! I'm almost there!" "I'm here! There are rocks around me!" From a distance - she saw it. A hand reached out desperately. "Tom!" she found herself trembling with joy. She was right! He was here all along! He wasn't dead! "I'm here!" A large cropping of rocks prevented her from reaching the hand, but after climbing up a hill of rocks, she saw Tom. He lay crouched in a cell of some sort. He looked like hell; his hair was long and matted, his hands bloody. He buried his head in his arms, trembling violently. She could hear him sobbing. "Tom!" she called. Tom looked up, and desperate blue eyes saw her. They widened. "B'Elanna! It's really you! I-I thought you were a hallucination! They put me down here so long I can't remember what a human voice sounded like - or a half Klingon's-" he babbled. "Shut up Tom," she cried joyfully. The sensation of hearing his voice, not the voice of a cloned Binom, gave her a surge of joy. "I don't have a phaser, but the doctor will be here soon, I'm sure both of us will figure out how to get you out." "B'Elanna - please, I want to feel your hand. It's been so long." He whispered. As he spoke, he pushed his hand between the bars, craning as far as he could to reach her. There was a two foot gap between the two of them; but all she had to do was jump to cross that small gap to hold his hand. "Yes." She reached out- \_

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\_ Janeway had her security entourage with her; Mariah Henley was with them, so was Lt. Ryes, both tough former Maquis mercenaries - it was

strange how she now regarded both of them the stable force in her relatively small Starfleet security force. Bahne, however, brought with him his Soldiers; - the Binoms with the diamond mark on their foreheads. They were around fifty of them. As they journeyed in the caves, Bahne explained that they were travelling in perhaps the most dangerous area in Surelis. "Surelis was a former asteroid, and it is in these caverns that we were born. And it is these caverns that he will kill us, his children." Janeway shivered, looking at the gloomy expanse before her. The cavern was filled with treacherous pits that could catch you unaware - she was told. She made it a point to stick close to Bahne. "Why must he kill his children?" she asked, her voice heavy with confusion. The thought of a mother killing her children was repulsive to her. Even the lowliest of creatures took care of their children - no matter how small the effort. "You would not understand, Captain. The only way I can explain \*why\* is that he is insane. But that term is not precise either. He is merely fulfilling a-" a pause as he searched for the right word. "-a biological function," he emphasized. "Killing your offspring is a biological function?" Janeway thought. He obviously heard her thoughts, because he raised an eyebrow in surprise. "At then end of a Mylar's life span, he is driven to kill his off spring and others that stand in his way. Do not ask me why; it has been the life cycle of my kind for eons. We have never questioned the Cycle of Life. Until Tom Paris came into our midst." His eyes misted. "He too did not understand. He was with us when we found the first body. I still remember his shock when we told him that it was the Mylar who killed Kesira," when Janeway gave him a puzzled look, Bahne explained, "Kesira was our youngest sibling. Tom and he...were good friends." "We can stop him, can't we?" Ryes interrupted, carefully side stepping a two feet hole - a hole that probably didn't end until a few miles. "It takes the combined might of at least twenty myurins to kill the Mylar." There was a sad tinge to his voice. "Now, there is only one." "Where is that myurin?" Bahne spared Janeway a quick glance. "He is here, Captain. Preparing to challenge his Mylar. Why else did I come, Captain?" he raised an eyebrow. He turned, about to walk further. "But you're only one," Janeway called, unwilling to let it go at that. "-you obviously can't kill him alone - if he is as powerful as you claim him to be. Are the soldiers here to help you?" "No Captain - they are merely \*kulinar\*, the Observers of Right. Although they have obeyed the Mylar all their lives, the Cycle of Life permits them not to obey the Mylar this once - when another myurin challenges his right as Mylar. But they will not attack the Mylar. Their duty is to destroy the Hive if the Challengers and the Mylar is destroyed." She could see Henley's eyes go as wide as they allowed. The crew shifted uncomfortably. At least now she understood why the Mylar thought they (or rather, Tom) were the cause of the Binom's extinction. With the failure of Tom's genes producing more myurins, it had doomed Bahne to a lost battle; and once he was killed, the Mylar will proceed to kill the rest of his children, driven by a extraordinary instinctual need. If the Mylar was killed with Bahne, the soldiers will carry out his bloody deed for him. \_ "There must be some way to avoid all this...killing! You talk as if you're programmed! You told me that you never questioned the Cycle of Life until Tom. I think Tom changed you somehow - not just his genes. You know you \*can\* escape this ruthless Cycle - you're just not brave enough," Janeway said sternly. Bahne raised an eyebrow. "You are as presumptuous as Tom Paris." "All humans are," she shot back, undaunted. Bahne looked at the Soldiers, but they returned his gaze impassively. "You do not understand, Captain. The decision is not mine. It is theirs." He gave a small smile and walked ahead of them, easily side stepping the cracks that

ran around the cavern. \_

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\_ "I can't believe this!" she heard a familiar voice echo in the caverns half way through their journey. She halted her entourage and looked around the cavern. Harry was already scanning for life forms. He shook his head, indicating that there weren't any. "Hmpph!" the voice hurrumphed. Janeway heaved a sigh of relief. "Doctor?" she called. She would wonder how he got here later. "Captain?" the doctor appeared from behind a huge slab of rock. He heaved his own sigh of relief. "Needless to say I'm glad to see you!" "Where's B'Elanna?" The computer had indicated that B'Elanna was the only individual (aside from missing computer subroutines) missing from the crew. "I don't know. She ran off chasing something. I can't believe I lost her!" He appeared annoyed with the fact. "Ran off?" she echoed. "Where was she last?" "About twenty meters from here." "Then let's get going." "Wait," Bahne called. Around him, the soldier Binoms halted, their eyes focused on a spot somewhere above the horizon. "Is something wrong?" Janeway merely had to see his eyes to know that something was wrong - \*very wrong\*. "Follow me!" He hissed. Turning, he ran to the north. "Not again." The doctor complained to himself. Sighing, he proceeded to run after them. \_

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\_ "B'Elanna - please, I want to feel your hand. It's been so long." "Yes." B'Elanna answered. She would never let him go ever again. She would hold him close and comfort him from all the pain that he had went through; she would wipe the blood off his hands with her very own- "Lieutenant!" someone called. Tom looked at her pleadingly. Then he stopped reaching for her, curling up in his cell, sobbing in anguish. "No, Tom! Don't give up! I'm coming-" Something grabbed her arm. She tried to shake it away, but it persisted. Angrily, she struggled violently from its grip, but they were like steel. Then she was punched. She landed on her back painfully. Her mind cleared; then promptly reddened in rage. She snarled angrily, preparing to deck the culprit until she saw Captain Janeway standing over her, rubbing a fist. "Tom!" she flung herself forward, all thoughts of revenge gone. "No, B'Elanna." It was Tom's voice, but nothing like him - she knew it was an imposter Binom. "Let me go, you \*pahtk\*! It's Tom! Can't you see how much he is in pain?!" Bahne watched her wordlessly for a brief second, then with a strength she didn't know he had, hauled her forward to where Tom lay- "See for yourself, B'Elanna Torres. See where you'll be if you had reached \*him\*." A yawning 10 feet cavern greeted her. Small stones tumbled down the abyss, disturbed from their rest by her struggles. Their fall did not cease until a long, long time. Of Tom there was no sign. "He was here. I'm telling you - I saw him. He was bloody, in pain and - I could smell his blood! That wasn't a hallucination! The Mylar - the Mylar must have taken him away!" But she could see from the Captain's face that she did not believe her. "You \*must\* believe me!" she snarled. "I believe that you saw Tom Paris, B'Elanna Torres." Bahne said, gripping her shoulders. "But he wasn't really there. The Mylar was luring you to your death. He wanted to \*kill you\*. Now that he has failed, he will try harder. On \*all\* of us. Do you understand?" he demanded harshly. She wasn't able to do anything for a moment - just swallow back the overwhelming disappointment and pain. "I must know-" she managed. "Don't lie to me and tell me stupid things, Bahne. I want to know where Tom is. Is he alive?" her voice faltered in the end. Bahne

nodded, giving her a smile that was strangely reassuring. "Tom is alive - but he is not here. I was instructed to leave him on a planet two light- years away from here. It is called Rya." The relief overshadowed the disappointment of knowing that he was not on Surelis. Suddenly, a sharp cry echoed in the cavern. The ground shook, and all of them were left holding the pillars around them. "Katherine!" Janeway looked up. The cavern was still shaking. "Chakotay?" she called. The doctor helped her to balance herself. "I did not hear him, Captain. I think it is another hallucination. Ignore it!" \_ The voice in her head laughed. Janeway's eyes widened as a hand reached out from the abyss. "Come join me Katherine." Chakotay asked, clinging on her boot. He appeared to be floating in the darkness of the abyss. "Let's have fun, Captain." He gave her a bright grin. "I don't think so." She shut her eyes. When she next opened her eyes, he was gone. She turned around; she saw Henley shaking her head, obviously clearing her head from an illusion. The team looked shaken. The Binoms looked terrified. Terrified? Another roar erupted somewhere deep in the caverns. \_

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\_ Chakotay groaned as stiffening muscles were brought back to life. Startled, he snapped his eyes open - but succeeded only in sending sledgehammers into his brain. In a distant, he heard a rumbling breath. the voice teased. Gathering his strength, he looked around. He was in a cavern, and from all appearances, he was ten feet above the floor, suspended in the air by sticky webbing. On his left was Tuvok. And around him- "Oh my God..." he whispered. the voice taunted. From the darkness, two silver eyes flared to life.

Suspended on similar webbing were around perhaps a hundred Binom bodies; most of them shriveled corpses. However, his eyes caught another type of species suspended with the Binoms on various parts of the cavern. They were extraordinarily beautiful...in an alien way, with silver gossamer wings and birdlike faces. Their silver eyes were empty in death. In the darkness, the silver eyes flared again. "We did nothing to you!" he cried out. Chakotay cried out as a lance of pain shredded his senses. he teased. Images flashed across his mind - much like the one he had experienced during his brief bond with the former Borg Collective - images of Tom crouching on the floor; images of blood staining the cavern floor; hands clawing desperately on the ground- The rumbling breath was closer. Breathing heavily, he shook the painful images away. He could see the faint outline of a creature - a large creature. Blinking stars from his still-spinning head, Chakotay squinted at the hulking shadow. he thought. "It is!" growled the voice. It boomed in the cavern. His voice sounded nothing like the gentle tones from three days ago. Of Tom's voice there was nothing. "I have Changed, Commander. I am prepared now to fulfill the Cycle of Life." He sounded proud of that achievement. "Now I await my challenger - who will surely die. And because of his incompetence, and the incompetence of my children, they must all die. Only the strong can lead the Hive. I will not pollute my seed with a weakling like Bahne!" He had no idea what the Mylar was talking about. He struggled in his bonds and furtively glanced at Tuvok, hoping that he'll regain consciousness - but he didn't. Suddenly, he felt a cold hand on his right hand. Shocked, he tried to yank it away, but it held tight. "Chakotay." The voice whispered from above. He craned his neck as much as he could. A Binom lay suspended above him, upside down, so that their faces touched. "Iolo?" Iolo nodded. Silver blood

ran down his face, and his hair was matted with it. He gave Chakotay a weak smile. "What are we doing here?" Chakotay shivered. "Not me." He hissed vehemently. Although telepathic, the voice sounded exhausted. "Stay still" Iolo whispered. He closed his eyes. The Mylar roared suddenly, and from the darkness, he saw the hulking figure reach out for him. He cried out, fighting his bonds, and felt Iolo grip his hand tightly. With a strength that amazed him, Iolo tore out of his bindings and hurled himself at the Mylar. He heard howls, roars and alien screams, then a shriek tore into his mind- \_\_

\_\_ Bahne suddenly cried out in pain, clutching his head. He doubled over in pain and fell to his knees. Somewhere ahead of them, the roar came again. When the haze of pain cleared, Bahne could see the Soldiers wincing - a mercy that their telepathic strength did not match that of a myurin. A mercy indeed. "What's wrong? I heard a shriek." B'Elanna did not mention how it had cut into her brain like a phaser set on the highest setting. Her head was still ringing. "Iolo is dead," he announced quietly. "It was his scream that we heard. Now the Mylar is calling me. We must go." He paused, considering something. "I tell you once again - leave now. You cannot survive here." He eyed Janeway empathetically. "Forget it. You know I mean what I said," Janeway insisted stubbornly. Bahne did not look the least surprised. "Then - Doctor?" The Doctor looked stunned at being mentioned. "Yes?" "Keep them safe. The Mylar will try to kill them whenever he could. You are the only one capable of steering them away from hallucinations. Meanwhile, Captain - I'll try distract the Mylar as much as I can. Get Tuvok and Chakotay out, and get out of Surelis!" he said with emphasis. "What's going to happen to you?" "My fate and the fate of my race had been sealed the day the Xyrons destroyed my planet, Captain. I only hope that I have repaid the debt of honour that I owe Tom Paris." Before she could stop him, Bahne stepped into the abyss. One by one, the Soldiers followed Bahne to the abyss, falling silently into the darkness. "What the hell?" Henley cried, rushing to the edge of the abyss with the others. "I can't see them! Could they have...committed suicide?" Henley asked, her eyes wide. Swallowing, Janeway could only gather her resolve. "I don't think we have much time. Let's go." \_\_

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\_\_ They landed gently at the bottom of the abyss. The first thing that Bahne saw were the bodies of his siblings, now dead, suspended on gossamer webbing around them. Then his eyes trailed to the lifeless body of Iolo, which lay inert on the floor. He could feel the Mylar watching his every move. Mielta said. it was Jona this time. Without healers to heal them of diseases and ailments, the Binoms will meet a short fate. Bahne knelt down beside the body. He touched the still warm blood and traced it on his face, a tribute to a Binom that should have been myurin. He closed the staring eyes.

The Mylar asked. A rumbling breath rolled around the cavern. he heard Melar say. the thought trailed off. He was surprised at Melar's thoughts. he looked at the Soldier Binom in surprise.

Mielta answered for Melar. He acknowledged that with a nod. And he saw the Mylar, and the Mylar towered ten feet above him. Silvery wings extended over a bird like face; and claws that were his hands unfurled to show gleaming talons. He had finally shed his old body - to acquire this new one. Mielta commented. Bahne closed his eyes, and the Mylar roared and struck him. \_\_

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\_\_\_ The Doctor faced a tough task. Aside from B'Ellana Torres and Captain Janeway who seemingly possessed incredible mental control, the crew had fallen to almost every hallucination thought possible. Henley thought she was still with the Maquis and shot at them to prove her point; Ryes fought with an unknown Borg, and the three other security officers that were with them had split off in different directions, gibbering about their own personal demons. The Captain had found it hard to rely on her tricorder (no, make it the \*only tricorder). Once it showed that two hundred life forms - known as Species 8472 by the Borg - surrounded them. She had promptly thrown it to the ground to step on it, but the Doctor managed to retrieve it in time. It was like taking care of seven crazed children. They stumbled into the dark tunnels, with the doctor prodding them forward. "They're closer, Captain. We're nearly there." "Look at this carvings!" B'Elanna cried. The Doctor thought that this was yet another hallucination, but he realized that they were indeed in a tunnel whose walls was filled with carvings. "How intriguing. Let's go." He pulled her hand. She promptly yanked it away. "I saw this in my dream! Remember, Captain?" The Captain was breathing heavily and didn't appear at all interested in what she was saying. "I can hear Tuvok calling me. I think they're behind us." Of course the doctor didn't hear that either. A roar erupted somewhere ahead of them. "There! Do you hear that? That's Chakotay!" "No Captain. \*That is certainly not Commander Chakotay." He swallowed, looking at his readings. "Well, but they are in that general direction." "Tom's father - Admiral Paris - he's there. He's not a good man." B'Elanna rambled. "I wouldn't think that." The Doctor murmured distractedly. Suddenly, the remaining away team gasped in unison, clutching their heads. The Doctor raised an eyebrow, and proceeded to help Captain Janeway, who had fallen to her knees. "Captain, are you-" "I'm fine, Doctor. Where the heck are we?" she shook her head. "You're- you're lucid?" "Thanks to that shriek that shredded my brain waves to pieces." Henley muttered from a distance. The tunnels shook as a roar erupted ahead. The crew protected their heads from falling stones. "Like I said, 'where are we?'" the Captain emphasized. "We're at the mouth of some kind of lair." B'Elanna answered. "In my dream, Tom told me that his Father was there -" she pointed at the darkness ahead of them. "I think the dream was telling me that this is the Mylar's lair." "Whatever." The Doctor muttered, wishing at the oment that Sigmund Freud was part of his database. "Tuvok and Chakotay are in there. We must hurry - I don't know how long any of you will stay lucid!" \_\_\_

\_\_\_ Bahne felt the talons tear into his skin and he inadvertently screamed. He fell twenty feet away, his fall stopped by a wall of rock. Choking, he crawled away from the advancing Mylar. he heard him say. Bahne rolled away in time, narrowly missed by talons that buried themselves in the ground. He knew he came here to die, but now that he was faced with that reality, he felt only overwhelming fear-fear that he would fail to stop this creature that will continue on to kill his other siblings. Killing them to fulfil a life cycle that should have been obsolete thousands of years ago. Then his race would be no more. The extinction of his race filled him with a primal fear.

He was greeted only by thoughts of bloodlust. He sank to his knees and cried out in pain as his mind was torn. he managed against the pain of the telepathic assault <-and the Binoms will live no more! You've spent 10,000 years preserving their lives! Surely you don't want to kill them now-> He saw the attack coming. Quickly, he unfurled the wings that lay buried in his back. Reluctantly, they

awoke, and shredded through his clothing. He flew away in time to avoid the arm that tried to swat him away like a fly. As he flew, he saw Janeway and her away team floundering towards Chakotay and Tuvok. The Mylar sensed his thoughts and turned. Bahne could almost see him smile. Chakotay felt someone shredding his bonds. Surprised, he saw the Captain, B'Ellana and the Doctor on his right. "Be quiet, Chakotay. I don't want them to hear us." "Hear us? They're too busy to hear you." Janeway acknowledged the all-too-near battle. Once his bonds were severed, Chakotay stumbled to his feet. Tuvok joined him shakily on the right. "Captain!" Henley cried. "Oh my God..." Without another word, B'Elanna fired her phaser at the creature -it towered ten feet over them. The Mylar roared in anger, but the phaser didn't seem to even scratch him. B'Ellana then saw Henley collapse to the ground, grabbing her head in pain. It wasn't long before she felt the shredding pain of the telepathic attack. Crying out, she lost hold of the phaser. The last thing she saw was a huge claw descending on her- Then she was lifted up. \_\_

\_\_ The Soldiers watch as the Mylar destroyed the Voyager creatures. Impassive and bred only to obey, they found themselves disturbed by the spectacle - for the first time in their long lives. It made no sense to them: Why should they question the Cycle that nurtured their race? Why should they help these creatures which held neither meaning nor purpose to them? Mielta argued. insisted another. Youwva wondered. He exchanged looks with Mielta. Mielta looked down, studying his 'human' hands. He remembered having this conversation with Tom Paris. "You are not robots, Mielta! I don't believe you when you say you have no choice - your race is obviously dying, it doesn't make any sense to obey such a stupid rule!" Frowning, Mielta made up his mind. one of his siblings responded to his thoughts. Nodding, he unfurled his wings and joined Bahne. \_\_

\_\_ Bahne hoped that his wings could hold them both. They were almost broken by what the constant pounding he took from the Mylar. B'Ellana roused in his arms and grunted in surprise when she realized that they were airborne. "You can fly?" The Mylar roared from a distance. Quickly, he bent his gossamer wings around them. He felt fine stones pelt them. He realised that now. When he landed, he almost fell. He gasped when his left wing finally broke. It shivered for a moment, then hung limply at his side. He was bleeding badly, and a quick scan of his body revealed that he had a brain hemorrhage. He was also bleeding internally. He would not survive long. "Are you alright?" B'Ellana asked brusquely, touching his face, apparently inspecting for wounds. Blinking back blood, he shook his head. "I'm dying. I told all of you to go, but you wouldn't listen. I'm afraid that you will die now." "Too late for that now. And - we're tougher than we look." B'Elanna answered, her voice shaking. The Mylar faced them, his silver eyes staring at them menacingly. Phaser blasts ricocheted harmlessly on his back. With a roar, it brought down a taloned hand, ready to crush them all- B'Elanna closed her eyes. \_\_

\_\_ Suddenly, shrieks filled the air. Like delicate butterflies, Binoms flew towards the Mylar, inflicting as much damage as they could. The Mylar roared in fury, swatting them like flies. Bahne watched in horror the soldiers died one by one. He saw Melar fall with a broken neck and Mielta died a quick death as his wings were snapped and he plummeted fifty feet to the floor. He heard a growl as B'Elanna activated her phaser and pointed it to the Mylar. He watched with blurred eyes at the battle that was a cacophony of violence as the Mylar fought off assaults from the fifty Soldier Binoms and the

phaser of the Voyager people. And the Mylar was winning. \_\_

\_\_ "Captain! Can you hear me?" The voice from the communicator barely rose above the noise of the battle. Janeway let off a phaser blast before replying. "Harry?" "We see you! Get ready!" "Get ready?" Chakotay threw Janeway a confused look. \_\_

\_\_ Around them, the caverns shook. Rocks tumbled, but the battle went on unheeded. More Soldier Binoms died, barely nicking a wound on the Mylar. Only twenty remained, fighting a hopeless battle. The rumblings got worse, and Janeway directed her crew one side under an outcrop of rocks, hoping the scant shelter would be enough to shield them. Her heart sank in despair when she saw B'Elanna unprotected in the open, crouching and firing her phaser. Suddenly there was a flare of light. \_\_

\_\_ Harry Kim fought trembling fingers as he activated the weapons. He saw Seven give him a 'I am ready look' and he nodded. "Activate phasers. On my mark - now!" Voyager's phasers burnt through the rock. He hoped the Captain wasn't in the line of fire. \_\_

\_\_ The phaser burnt through the cavern and struck the Mylar. He howled once, then collapsed, trashing. Some of the Soldiers were caught in the fire, and was instantly killed, leaving nothing but ashes. Only ten managed to escape. The Mylar tried to get up. \_\_

\_\_ Bahne readied himself, and unfurled his wings. He pushed the pain of his broken wing aside, willing it to heal as fast as he could. \_\_ The Mylar's eyes watched him. Letting out a cry, he launched himself towards the Mylar and gripped his head - the Mylar roared and tried to dislodge him, but he stubbornly held on, readying his mind- Using all his energy, he called his brothers to join their minds. The remaining ten Binom Soldiers answered his call, latching themselves on the Binom and lending their energy to his. It wasn't enough - but it will have to do. With all his might, Bahne reached out with his mind- -and shut off the Mylar's consciousness. \_\_

\_\_ There was a hideous scream in the background, and he could feel the Mylar's mind wriggling to get free, but all of them held tightly. He realized after a moment, that they were being joined by more Binoms - drones and soldiers; until their numbers were no longer tens but hundreds. He saw the light of the Mylar's mind; he saw him as a young myurin, clawing out of the debris of the homeworld; he felt the terror he felt when he realized that he was the only one left; he felt the joy of birthing his first child; and he felt the despair of the Mylar when he realized that he was slowly losing his sanity; Bahne saw himself through the eyes of the Mylar as he regarded him that fateful day. He had found ten bodies in the chambers and wanted to know why- "Mylar, what did you do?" "I am changing, my child. And we are going to die." Slowly, the light of life dimmed from the Mylar. It grew smaller until it was no more. But all of them heard the Mylar before he died. He was relieved. \_\_

\_\_ When Bahne opened his eyes, he was sitting on a pile of ashes.

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\_\_ Surelis spun quietly in space. Silver eyes regarded the array, wondering what the future lay. \_\_

\_\_\_ Bahne told her that he would not join the Binoms telepathically as thousands of Mylars before him had done. He wanted them to be free of the Collective Bond - to be 'individuals'. "If that is possible." "I don't see why not." Janeway assured him. But Bahne still looked disturbed - even depressed. He stood at sickbay, gazing out at the windows. The Doctor had healed him of his wounds, and he had recovered very quickly. Unlike Tom, he did not protest when the Doctor asked him to stay for further observations. They were now orbiting around Surelis, and Surelis spun gracefully outside. "I still do not understand what happened to us," Bahne said after a moment of silence. "I do not know whether we're freed or whether our lives have been disrupted." He had decided that in order for the Cycle of Life to be broken, the Binoms had to be free of the Collective Mind. He was worried that he would Change in the future, but the holographic doctor assured him that Tom's genes had seen to that. He would no longer be subjected to the cruel life cycle of a Mylar. "Learning to be individuals can be a tough process. Especially for a collective species." Bahne nodded. Gently, he touched Surelis' reflection on the window. "The Mylar wasn't evil, Captain." Janeway cleared her throat, politely dispensing that thought away. "Do not worry, Captain, I do not take offence. I just wished you knew him before the Change took him over. He was, in human terms, almost loving." He smiled. "He would spend days telling Iolo and I that there was a way to break out of the Cycle. Back then, we didn't agree. We thought that the Cycle was our god. We thought that it was sacrilege to foul it in any way." "Strange how things turned out?" He nodded. He turned when he saw B'Elanna Torres exiting the sickbay. Janeway watched him follow her and permitted herself a small smile. "Captain?" the Doctor appeared from a corner. "Hmph." He grumbled. "I see the old Paris genes are still active." "What's wrong, doctor?" "I found some anomalous readings on Bahne that I needed to clarify. Naturally, I asked him to stay for further observations. Naturally he didn't obey me." He finished irritably. However, Janeway noticed that he appeared self-conscious. "Doctor, what's wrong with Bahne?" she was getting worried. He cleared his throat. "He's pregnant." \_\_\_

\_\_\_ "B'Elanna Torres?" B'Elanna turned and saw Bahne walking towards her. She took a deep breath. "And how are you, Bahne?" "I am well." He smiled. They stood awkwardly for a moment, and B'Elanna laughed shortly after a while. Bahne merely cocked his head aside. "You just remind me of the time when - you know, after Vorik had his ponn farr - and we were in the turbolift-" she gestured, smiling a small smile. "You had that same helpless look Tom had on your face." "I can see that, B'Elanna Torres." He smiled. "Listen, you don't have to call me 'B'Elanna Torres'. Just B'Elanna would do. It makes me feel...old." "I am not good with human words, B'Elanna, but I wish to apologize for the suffering we have put you through." B'Elanna shifted uncomfortably. "You don't have to, Bahne. It's over." "Tom Paris have always...loved you, B'Elanna. What you go through is important to me. I've made a promise to take care of you and your shipmates. And there is one more promise I have not kept." "What?" she found herself being curious. "The holographic projector I gave you is not merely a holographic projector." "What do you mean? What else can it be?" "Perrin, my sibling, created it for Tom Paris. It is a telepathic device designed to link your mind to his. Paris had hoped to warn you about the Mylar with this device." She felt her breath catch. "All those dreams I had. It was because of the holographic projector,

wasn't it? And Tom \*was\* really there?" He nodded. "Keep it well, B'Elanna. It will help you find him." He paused. "Be prepared when you meet him, B'Elanna. He has been changed. But I have given him something to help him survive." He gazed at her for a moment, and hesitantly, he lay a tender kiss on her lips. He gave her a final glance, and walked away. She didn't want to know what he meant.

\_\_\_ \* \* \* Departing from Surelis Day 11 \_\_\_

\_\_\_ Janeway was in her ready room, and she saw Surelis getting smaller and smaller through the window. Bahne was pregnant. She huffed in amusement, shaking her head. She knew that the Binoms were asexual, but somehow the thought of 'Tom' being pregnant...well, amused her. She remembered Chakotay's (and the rest of the crew's) embarrassed expression when Bahne announced that he would name his first child after Tom Paris. They couldn't quite meet his eyes after that. They have also given Bahne other good news. Apparently, Tom's genes did produce more myurins - in a matter of speaking. It was two days ago that the Doctor discovered that \*all\* the Binoms had the necessary reproductive organs to reproduce. "And they seem to be functioning within normal parameters." He had reported with a smug grin on his face. All they needed now were females. The doctor had a daunting task explaining the function of females to the curious Binoms. The thought of them, mere drones and soldiers, producing children shocked and intoxicated them. The doctor was helpful enough to provide the DNA of some of Voyager's crew members to incorporate into Binom DNA. The female crew members were hesitant at first (some were downright reluctant), but after B'Elanna stepped forward and offered hers, the others followed like dominoes. Tuvok had wondered whether it was a direct violation of the Prime Directive, but Janeway conceded that it had been a fair trade - DNA for supplies, ship repairs and minerals. They have left behind a race that was on the brink of a new era, and it left her with a great feeling. They have also left behind the most intriguing species they've ever met. One that is greatly noble, and yet greatly savage at the same time. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ Now - to Rya. \_\_\_

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\_\_\_ B'Elanna dreamt of trees that night. They stretched endlessly into the sunset. She was sitting beside Tom, and he was holding her hand. Her eye met his. "It won't be long now, B'Elanna," he whispered.

\_\_\_ THE END - THE CHILDREN OF SURELIS (c) Jan 1997 Lanna (c) May 1998, Revised. Hoped you enjoyed this story! The continuation, the Mirrors of Rya is next... \_\_\_

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